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Dimensions of child's psychological maturation and preparation for school

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Abstract

The paper aims to highlight the importance of preschool years in the context of childhood and, especially, the role of kindergarten for the maturation process of the child. We intend to explore the process of psychic maturation and development of preschoolers, as a prerequisite for the passage to the school status and the learning activities in school. We also plan to reveal a very close relationship between the educational model in kindergarten and the degree of psychological preparation for school learning.

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1. Introduction

As a transition stage between family and school, kindergarten trains the children in similar duties to the scholar ones, given as a game, amplifies his intellectual possibilities, activates him mentally and motivationally, puts him in contact with the demands for school beginning, contributing to the premises necessary in order to start school in the conditions of an optimal psychological preparation of the child. (Cole, Cole, 1989)

2. Premises

Preparing the child for school, doesn't refer to teaching him to write, to read or to count earlier, but supposes to prepare him for a new way of accumulating knowledges and experiences to help him having

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disponibility for learning activity. This positive psychological estate is necessary for the moment when the school starts. (Golu, 2010) The chosen theme has implication and the personal and also psycho-intellectual and psycho-emotional development issues of the child. We propose to explore, having different views and different means, the maturation and psychological development process of the preschooler child, as a premises of his passing to the statute of pupil and to the learning activity from school. Thus, we purpose to reveal the existence of a very strong relation between the educational model from kindergarten and the degree of maturation and psychological training of the child for scholar learning.

Actually, we wish our study to be an important source of suggestions and recommendations regarding the way in which it can be better assured the transition from the game activity to the learning activity and the way in which the teacher can be helped to improve the performances regarding the facilitation of this process.

The paper's issue has a double value: ascertaining and analytical, because it measures with various instruments the level of intellectual maturity (The Bender-Gestalt Test and The Raven Progressive Matrices), emotional (Test of Emotional Maturity), motivation (questionnaire for revealing child's interest and stated reasons for school activities) and personality (The Family Design Test) maturity of the child; innovative, because it offers and argues a new vision of how translation from game activities to learning activities can be better guaranteed, by applying a personal development program for children, designed as a set of challenging tasks, with formative effects for children.

3. Objectives

Thus we purpose: to make measurements on the mental development of preschool children; to investigate the affective and motivation particularities and also the personality dimensions of preschool children; to underline the way in which the link of these elements participate to the maturation and psychological preparation for school; to elaborate and to implement a personal development program in order to prepare the child for school experiences.

4. Hypothesis

In order to make these research I've proposed three relevant hypothesis in conformity with the objectives mentioned before: we suppose that there is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the level of motivational development for school and the level of personality development; we suppose there is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the level of motivational development for school and the level of affective maturity; we suppose that there is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the level of mental development and the level of personality development; we suppose that the preschool children included in a formative training program will accede easier to the proper school learning program. Starting from this, we initiated an analytical diagnostic approach, following the measurement of maturation and development level of preschool child on four domains: cognitive, motivational-affective and personality.

4.1. Variables

For this research I've used a set of four independent variables. The level of intellectual maturity was assessed with the Bender-Gestalt Test and The Color Progressive Matrix Raven Test. The level of emotional development was assessed by an emotional maturity questionnaire. Motivational maturity was

measured by using a micro inquiry in order to reveal the interest and the declared reason for scholar activity. Finally, the children personality was assessed using the Family Drawing Test.

4.2. Subjects

Our research was made in three kindergartens in Bucharest, using 60 preschool children, distributed almost equally in three groups. Depending on the gender of the subject, our participants are 34 boys and 26 girls, with ages of 5 years, 5 years and 6 months, 6 years and 6 years and 6 months. Regarding environment provenance, the preschool children have origins in homogeneous, organized and stabile families, form urban environment. The parents have medium and university education, offering a good financial, social and cultural base for raising and caring the children.

5. Methods and instruments

One of the psychical items involved in written language acquirement is the motrical perceptive function, meaning the child ability to exactly perceive spatial configurations, to compare between them, so to see the space and the shape. The Bender-Gestalt test helps us to diagnose this motrical perceptive function, being a psychogenetic test of development. The Raven Color Progressive Matrix Test investigates the child capacity to perceive the component parts as an organized hole, within a structure being in his visual horizon. By presenting items in an order corresponding to a progressive difficulty the test, offers us data regarding the child capacity to involve in a certain working framework, to capture it as an algorithm and to learn it. For underlining the declared interest and motivation for school we built a interview guide, a semi structured inquiry instrument which proposes itself to determine the way in which the preschoolers are representing themselves the future activities and relations, the images concerning the scholar institution and, having as base these representations, the measure in which the children feel themselves attracted, motivated for school. We propose to underline the degree of emotional maturity of the preschooler by using conceptually correlated items, which address either to children or to parents and teachers. Its dimensions are: type and quality of attachment, establishing relations; reactions to the rules, limits, establishing the border and different contact identification process; emotional disponibility, toleration to frustration, the attitude over the participation to activities, participation to group activities versus the egocentrism degree, the adaptation process. We choose the Drawing Family Test as projective test for preschool child personality investigation, being known that this test allows underlining the emotional maturity degree, the sexual differentiation degree, the child-parents / children-brothers conflicts, estimations of the intelligence level.

The three play-activities we've built (Sad and happy balloons, Painting emotions, Theater of feelings) follow these objectives: making children relax and feel in o more facile way by their growing awareness, developing empathically and expressive capacities, developing the emotional vocabulary, developing the emotional control and the solving capacities by involving pro social and socializing behaviors. These play-activities connect the individual game with the group game (of 10-15 children), by using and involving special methods: body techniques, creative-expressive techniques, exercise, role play, exposure and self analyses.

6. Results' interpretation

The Raven Test measures the non-verbal intelligence component and captures a general and universal mechanism of child's mental development, being less modeled and influenced form a social point of view. As a genetic test, the Bender-Gestalt Test underlines the evolution of various shapes and

fundamental geometrical forms reproductions, from one age to another. Thus, 48,5% of the results are over the medium, with the biggest percent of success, 10% in 70 percentiles. Mental age and intelligence play an important role in determining the success at Bender-Gestalt Test. Space perceptive-motrical organizations involved in reading and writing learning activities are a function of the intelligence. So, we've also analyzed the correlation between the results from the Raven Test with the ones of the Bender-Gestalt Test and we could find a positive correlation ($r = 0,455$, $p = 0,001$), meaning an intrinsic relation between the recognition of some figural patterns and the capacity to reproduce them correctly, to detect an algorithm of the figural elements and to replay it as soon as possible, keeping the placement criteria, the organization of constitutive elements.

Further, we've passed to the inferential statistic of hypothesis. Regarding the first hypothesis, I've used the Pearson correlation and we've obtained a value of $r = 0,657$ and $p = 0,000$. These factors of the correlation indicate the existence of an important connection between the attitude shown by the parents in the education of the children and of the preschoolers' motivation for school. Regarding the second hypothesis we could see that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = 0,583$ and $p = 0,000$) between the level of the emotional maturation and the level of motivation for school. These things show the powerful relation played by the parental assistance and children motivation to go to school and to integrate to the group, in most of the social situations. This is a relation that should be more used and should be taken into consideration, because, we are convinced that in the moment when the children are getting mature in an environment in which they can trust the others around them, there won't be problems in extending these trust. Regarding the third hypothesis, we could see that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = 0,512$ and $p = 0,000$) between the level of intellectual maturation and the level of personality maturation. The Drawing Family Test also represents a development test for children, because in this case, drawing skills correlate with mental development. In other words, it shows the correlation between mental age and chronological age, the projective-imaginative function involving the presence of a certain level of development. This means that the obtained data through these two instruments are congruent and it means that between the development of intellectual abilities and the projective-imaginative capacity there is a connection, one supporting the other.

The innovative part of the study is expressed by the personal development program we've elaborated and implemented, using a set of play-activities. The activity "Sad and happy balloons" stimulated the openness of the child to play, creativity in expression. The children have identified different verbal labels for different emotions (joy, sadness, anger, boring, concern, fear), they have exploited these estates by involving in different role play activities proposed by themselves or by the psychologist. At the end, they made a dance of the colored balloons, this moment being lived happily by all the children.

During the activity "Painting emotions", the children relaxed, painting various feelings/emotions using the technique that they love very much, finger painting. The products of their activity, the drawings have been different and original, each children having his own emotional creating contribution in the work that he made. The colors chosen for painting emotions, the fluidity of the movements, the tones and the consistency of the color fleck can offer important hints regarding the quality and effectiveness of cognitions. Regarding the participation of the children to the "Theater of feelings" activity, we mentioned that they shown a special interest for role play, the mime-pantomime elements specific to a theatre play. They felt with pleasure and enthusiasm different emotional estates, they spoke about the role and importance of the emotions in their life, giving as examples important situations from their lives. They combined with success elements of verbal and nonverbal language, telling about emotions and feelings. The body as a whole was their instrument for communicating with the others (the group) different emotional messages.

7. Conclusions

The exploratory study realized by using a multiple psycho-diagnosis methodology, allowed us to draw conclusions over the development of the maturation of some essential components of the preschooler's personality, in the condition in which we do not interfere in the way in which they develop, but we just evaluate the effects. So, we've explored the particularities of the cognitive, motivational, emotional and personality development domains, and we've obtained a serious of data which validated the hypothesis of our research and which contribute to the development of a psychological profile of the children. The existence of a positive significant correlation between the figural aspects, non-verbal and logical verbal components of the intelligence demonstrates the necessity to underline, in the didactic activity, on both components of intelligence. Thus, it provides a correlation between the cultural accumulations, achieved through communicational and logical factors, with the figural and non-verbal factors, as premises of child's school success. The positive results at Bender-Gestalt Test show us that there are conditions to determine a flexible mental operativity, necessary in order to acquire a lot of knowledges, abilities and capacities involved in scholar life, using adequate strategies. The investigation of the motivational domain showed us that, spontaneously, the children are attracted by school and activities related to school, but sometimes, under the influence of negative parental models, negative and constraining parental models they can make a negative representation of school, which would play a negative role in the success of a future scholar, in spite of his cognitive maturation for meeting the scholar demands. The investigation of affective domain showed us a dynamic image of the preschool child: an active, curious, empathic, communicative subject, and emotionally opened, psychologically prepared to face changes and challenges that will bring the school environment. The data obtained from the Drawing Family Test showed us a deeper image over the emotional and social maturation level of preschoolers.

All this acquisitions allow us to notice that, from a psychological point of view, the analyzed preschoolers are prepared to pass from a very personalized environment, as it is the one of the family and of the kindergarten, in a more rigid and less personalized environment, as it is the scholar one. They've obtained that internal security and emotional autonomy which makes them be prepared in order to confront with the demands of scholar activity. Furthermore, the adaptation performances of the child will depend on the particularities of the educational and instructional models, under the effect of which is the child during the school years.

8. Further directions

The continuation of these findings, under the form of a formative-experimental intervention, convinced us that the participation of children to an improved program of training stimulates their development. To put into practice this formative interventions underline the fact that, being in situations special created and semi coordinated, of play and learning, of more intense activation, the preschoolers can offer a rich image in what concerns their possibilities and disponibilities, compared with the ones in minimally influenced or of spontaneously learning working conditions. (Golu, 2010) It can be supposed that, if we multiply the formative intervention occasions in the domain of cognitive and motivational processes of the preschooler, using attractive, provocative, unconstraining approaches, we will help the preschoolers to improve their acquirements and to increase the competence index for scholar learning. By all these, our study may be used as a source of suggestions and recommendations for educators, who can improve their performances regarding the facilitation of this process.

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